

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-08 COME-00 OES-06 INT-05 TRSE-00

FEAE-00 AGRE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01 /082 W

-----251552Z 102580 /50

R 241740Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9493

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SP

SUBJECT:3 ELECTION PREVIEW: ASTURIAS

SUMMARY: AS PART OF OUR EFFORT TO PROVIDE THE DEPT WITH PRE-ELECTION ATMOSPHERES FROM REPRESENTATIVE OUTLYING PROVINCES, AMCONSUL BILBAO RECENTLY TRAVELED TO ASTURIAS, WHICH WILL HAVE 10 DEPUTIES AND 4 SENATORS IN THE NEW CORTES. ON THE BASIS OF HIS PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONTACTSWITH A WIDE VARIETY OF PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL OFFICIALS, POLITICAL PARTY FIGURES, COMMUNITY LEADERS AND NEWSPAPERMEN, HE HAS FILED THE REPORT WHICH IS PROVIDED BELOW. THE EARLY ESTIMATES OF PARTY STRENGTH IN ASTURIAS DO NOT VARY MUCH FROM CURRENT APPRECIATIONS OF LIKELY NATIONWIDE SHOWINGS, ALTHOUGH WE CAUTION THAT THEY REMAIN VERY TENTATIVE SINCE POLLING EFFORTS CONTINUE TO TURN UP ABOUT A 40 PERCENT NO-RESPONSE RATE. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND. ABOUT 1.1 MILLION OF SPAIN'S 35.5 MILLION INHABITANTS LIVE IN THE NORTHERN COASTAL REGION OF ASTURIAS, WHICH CONSISTS OF THE SINGLE PROVINCE OF OVIDEO. NEITHER ROMANS NOR MOSLEMS EVER DOMINATED THE REGION, AND IT WAS IN ASTURIAS THAT THE CHRISTIAN RECONQUEST OF THE PENINSULA FROM
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THE MOORS BEGAN. A LOCAL DIALECT CALLED "BABLE" HAS REMAINED DISTINCT FROM CASTILLIAN SPANISH, BUT WITHOUT PARTICULAR STATUS.

2. ECONOMY. SINCE THE LATE 1700'S, ASTURIAS HAS BEEN SPAIN'S MOST IMPORTANT COAL-MINING REGION AND ONE OF ITS MOST IMPORTANT STEEL PRODUCERS; IN 1973, IT MINED 70 PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY'S COAL AND MANUFACTURED 50 PERCENT OF ITS STEEL. PERHAPS DUE

TO THE LACK OF MEDIUM-SCALE INDUSTRY, HOWEVER, THE URBAN-INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRIANGLE COMPOSED OF ASTURIAS'S THREE MAJOR CITIES--OVIEDO AVILES AND GIJON--LAGS BEHIND THAT OF AT LEAST 6 OTHER SUCH AREAS IN SPAIN, AND THE PROVINCE'S GROWTH HAS NOT KEPT PACE WITH THE COUNTRY'S AS A WHOLE (PER CAPITA INCOME IN ASTURIAS WAS 6TH IN THE COUNTRY IN 1955, 19TH IN 1973). THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE HAS BEEN HAMPERED BY WIDESPREAD FRAGMENTATION INTO SMALL FARMS (MINIFUNDIA).

3. POLITICAL CONTRASTS. WHILE ASTURIAS'S SMALL FARMERS IN PARTICULAR TEND TO BE QUITE CONSERVATIVE, THE REGION'S INDUSTRIAL CONCENTRATIONS HAVE LONG BEEN A FERTILE FIELD FOR THE SPANISH LEFT. THE SPANISH SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY (PSOE) AND ITS LABOR UNION AFFILIATE, THE GENERAL UNION OF WORKERS (UGT), ESTABLISHED EARLY STRENGTH THERE IN THE LATE 1800'S. LATER, THE SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY (PCE), THOUGH OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE NATIONALLY, WIELDED DISPROPORTIONATE CLOUT IN THE ASTURIAN COAL FIELDS AND WAS MUCH INVOLVED IN THE 1934 MINERS' STRIKE, WHOSE FORCIBLE SUPPRESSION BY FRANCO-LED FORCES CONTRIBUTED HEAVILY TO THE POLARIZATION OF SPANISH POLITICS WHICH LED TO THE OUTBREAK OF CIVIL WAR IN 1936. THE PCE-DOMINATED SPANISH WORKERS' COMMISSIONS ORIGINATED IN ASTURIAS IN 1956, AND THEY CONTINUE TO BE THE DOMINANT FORCE AMONG COAL MINERS.

4. ...AND UNCERTAINTIES. AS IS GENERALLY THE CASE THROUGHOUT SPAIN, ELECTION ISSUES, NOT TO MENTION ALLIANCES AND STRATEGIES, HAVE YET TO BE CLEARLY DEFINED. CERTAINLY, ASTURIAS IS FAR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FROM THE RADICAL SEEDBED OF THE 1930'S, ALTHOUGH SOCIAL TENSIONS AND ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES OBVIOUSLY PERSIST. THE GIANT GOVT INDUSTRIES OF HUNOSA (COAL) AND ENSIDESA (STEEL) PROVIDE A MODERATELY GOOD STANDARD OF LIVING TO NEARLY 60,000 FAMILIES AND INDIRECT SUPPORT TO THOUSANDS MORE. THIS, TOGETHER WITH THE FACT THAT MANY INDUSTRIAL WORKERS LIVE ON THEIR OWN SMALL FARMS, CONTRIBUTES TO A RELATIVELY STABLE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION (ALTHOUGH UNEMPLOYMENT, AT 15,000, IS SIX TIMES GREATER THAN IN 1970, IT STILL IS NOT A BURNING ISSUE). LOCAL ISSUES DO NOT APPEAR TO GENERATE MUCH CONTROVERSY AT THIS POINT, AND INTERNATIONAL THEMES, SUCH AS NATO AND US BASES IN SPAIN, EXCITE NO INTEREST AS ALL.

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USIA-06 EB-08 COME-00 OES-06 INT-05 TRSE-00
FEAE-00 AGRE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01 /082 W
-----251551Z 102984 /50

R 241740Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
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5. ELECTORAL PROSPECTS: THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM IN ASTURIAS
BREAKS DOWN VERY MUCH ALONG NATIONAL LINES, PARTICULARLY SINCE
THERE ARE NO STRONG REGIONAL PARTIES.(10 SEATS IN THE LOWER HOUSE).
--ON THE RIGHT, FRAGA'S ALIANZA POPULAR (AP) ENJOYS SUBSTANTIAL
SUPPORT AMONG MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE GOVT
BUREAUCRACY AND HAS PARTICULARLY STRONG APPEAL IN FARMING
AREAS. AP IS LED IN ASTURIAS BY LUIS DE LA VALLINA, PRESIDENT
OF THE OVIEDO PROVINCIAL COUNCIL (DIPUTACION) WHILE ITS LEADING
FIGURE IN THE RURAL SECTOR IS CORTES DEUPTY JESUS SAEZ DE
MIERA, PRESIDENT OF THE "CAJA RURUAL," THE AGRICULTURAL SYNDI-
CATE, AND THE "CENTRAL LECHERA." ESTIMATES OF AP DRAWING
POWER AT THE POLLS VARY FROM 20 TO 45 PERCENT, WITH THE
AVERAGE RUNNING AROUND 30 PERCENT.
--ASTURIAS HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A REGION WITHOUT A POLITICAL
CENTER, ALTHOUGH CENTER GROUPINGS ARE MAKING PROGRESS AND
SHOULD RECEIVE A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE VOTE. ESTIMATES
OF "CENTRO DEMOCRATICO" STRENGTH RUN FROM 10 TO 20 PERCENT,
WITH ALVAREZ DE MIRANDA'S PPDC, LED BY LAWYER, JUDGE AND
FORMER OVIEDO UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR LUIS VEGA ESCANDON,
APPEARING TO BE THE LEADING "CENTRO" ELEMENT AT THIS POINT.
ESTIMATES OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC "TEAM" ELECTORAL STRENGTH
RUN SOMEWHAT LESS, FROM 6 TO 15 PERCENT, WITH THE ONLY
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REGIONAL LEADER OF ANY STATURE BEING ANASTASIO CORTE ZAPICO,
A MEDICAL DOCTOR WHO IS SEC GEN OF THE PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE
OF RUIZ GIMENEZ'S "IZQUIERDA DEMOCRATICA" (ID). THE CENTER-
LEFT COALITION OF SMALL SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC GROUPINGS (MURILLO'S
PSOE-H, GARCIA LOPEZ'S PSDE, CANTARERO'S RSE, LASUEN'S FSD)
HAS NOT GOTTEN FAR OFF THE GROUND, AND IS GIVEN PERHAPS 7 TO

10 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. THIS WOULD LEAVE THE CENTER, BROADLY DEFINED, WITH 23 TO 45 PERCENT.

--AS A TRADITIONAL SOCIALIST AND UGT LABOR STRONGHOLD, ASTURIAS SHOULD BE DOMINATED ON THE LEFT BY THE PSOE, WITH AN ESTIMATED VOTE BETWEEN 15 AND 25 PERCENT. THE PSOE HAS A RELATIVELY BROAD BASE OF SUPPORTERS, DESPITE THE ABSENCE OF OUTSTANDING LOCAL LEADERS. REGIONAL SECRETARY RAFAEL FERNANDEZ (RECENTLY RETURNED FROM MEXICAN EXILE) AND EMILIO BARBON, A LAWYER AND UGT SEC GEN FOR ASTURIAS, ARE EXPECTED TO BE THE PSOE'S LEADING VOTE-GETTERS IN THE PROVINCE.

--PCE SEC GEN CARRILLO, WHO WAS BORN IN GIJON, AND REGIONAL SEC GEN HORACIO FERNANDEZ IGUANZO APPEAR TO BE THE COMMUNISTS' LEADING ELECTORAL CONTENDERS IN THE REGION. NOTWITHSTANDING THE STRONG WORKERS' COMMISSION ORGANIZATION, HOWEVER, MANY WORKERS ARE LEERY OF THE PCE AND IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT CARRILLO'S RECENT VISIT TO ASTURIAS PRODUCED ONLY MODERATE INTEREST. ESTIMATES OF PCE VOTING STRENGTH RANGE FROM 4 TO 14 PERCENT, WITH THE AVERAGE RUNNING AROUND 10 PERCENT.

--IN THE WINGS THERE IS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF ACTIVITY ON THE PART OF FAR-LEFT AND PRO-AUTONOMY MINI-GROUPINGS. THE LOCAL "MOVIMIENTO COMUNISTA" (MC) AND THE FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST PARTIES (FPS) AFFILIATE, SOCIALIST RECONSTRUCTION OF ASTURIAS (RSA) HAVE FORMED AN ALLIANCE CALLING ITSELF THE ASTURIAN BLOCK, WHICH, AMONG OTHER THINGS, COMBINES A CALL FOR REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL CHANGE WITH ONE FOR REGIONAL AUTONOMY. NEITHER EVOKES MUCH OF AN ECHO IN ASTURIAS.

6. COMMENT: THESE EDUCATED GUESSES AS TO LIKELY ELECTORAL APPEAL IN ASTURIAS FALL NEAR THE LIMITS USUALLY BRUIED ABOUT ON A NATIONAL BASIS, WITH THE LARGEST VOTE-GETTERS BEING AP, THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CENTER, BROADLY DEFINED, THE SOCIALISTS, PARTICULARLY THE PSOE, AND FAR BACK, THE PCE. WE NOTE THAT OF 750,962 VOTERS REGISTERED FOR THE DECEMBER REFERENDUM IN ASTURIAS, 538,823 ACTUALLY VOTED. OF THESE, 500,768 (92.9 PERCENT) VOTED "YES", 21,893 (4.1 PERCENT) VOTED "NO", 15,024 (2.8 PERCENT) VOTED IN BLANK, AND 1,138 BALLOTS (0.2 PERCENT) WERE VOIDED. EATON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, ELECTION FORECASTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 24-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MADRID02213
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770103-0149
Format: TEL
From: MADRID
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770327/aaaaawyx.tel
Line Count: 212
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 249ef0b2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3010581
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: 3 ELECTION PREVIEW: ASTURIAS SUMMARY: AS PART OF OUR EFFORT TO PROVIDE THE DEPT WITH PRE- ELECTION ATMOSPHERES FROM REPRESENTATIVE OUTLYING
TAGS: PINT, SP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/249ef0b2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009